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Richard Asbeck (ed.)

Religious Pluralism
Modern Concepts for Interfaith Dialogue

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Religious pluralism can be viewed from a dogmatic as well as a political perspective. As an applied dogma, it provides a foundation for social harmony among religions. Christianity and Islam have succeeded in this respect to a large extent. As with many dogmatic principles, the actual application can result in modifications. In the case of Christianity and Islam, notable dogmatic changes were introduced in the 20th century. On the one hand, the Second Vatican Council provided a broad understanding for coexistence between Christianity and Islam. On the other hand, modernist Islamic concepts like the Indonesian Pancasila similarly contributed to religious coexistence from the Muslim point of view. These dogmatic changes are even more evident, if the long time span and the geographic expansion of both monotheistic religions are taken into consideration.

The encounter between Christianity and Islam has expanded considerably in a globalized world. Demographic growth as well as an ever increasing flow of individuals and information sustains this development. The multitude of exchange and togetherness are hence a persistent test of reality for the two monotheistic religions. How inclusive and functional are their concepts, given the growing interaction between followers of both faiths? How adaptable are their concepts with respect to societal disparity and variety? Despite the evolutionary trends towards modernization and adaptation, we are currently also experiencing opposite trends. Anti-modernist and fundamentalist movements have recently begun to question the principles of religious pluralism in a way that inhibits peaceful coexistence. For this reason, it is important to identify those dogmatic developments which can uncontestedly strengthen the foundation of religious pluralism. But also the actual application, resulting in an increased social harmony, needs to be brought to a wider public.

The present publication intends to draw attention to recent developments, with an emphasis on the interfaith dialogue in Germany and the modernist Islamic concept of religious pluralism in Indonesia. It begins with a study by Philipp W. Hildmann on the requirements for an interreligious dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Arguing that both religions are inherently intolerant, since each faith claims to be the true divine revelation, he proposes to shift interfaith dialogue to the domain of secular rationality. Secular rationality may hence be the vehicle of understanding among different faiths. Such an approach has been recently manifested in mutual declarations by the Vatican and Iranian Shiite clergy in 2008, which have concluded that "Faith and rationality do not contradict each other, but faith can sometimes stand above rationality, although it never is in opposition".

These thoughts on the limitation of an entirely theological discourse are followed by a study by Erdal Toprakyaran, who focuses on "The changeability of Islamic principles" with respect to religious pluralism. Comparing different historical settings, he sees a certain relativity of the Islamic dogma and argues that politically motivated interpretation had the most significant impact on a pluralistic reality. Especially the expansion of Islam to the East, where for instance the Mogul Emperor Akbar subjected numerous Hindus and Buddhists under Islamic rule, resulted in a rather flexible interpretation of the concept of ahl al-kitab.
Günther Beckstein, who participated in the German-Islam Dialogue as the then Bavarian Minister of the Interior, continues on similar lines. He finds that interfaith harmony lies much more "with the people themselves, in the willingness of the majority to live together in peace and to engage in a peaceful dialogue". Beckstein also sees a promising development in the increasing number of interfaith marriages in Germany, which are in a sense the very fruitful breeding ground for interreligious dialogue. Nevertheless, there will always be some problem areas of disagreement and incompatibility, but these can be overcome by a sense of cooperation and togetherness, as illustrated by the famous "Parable of the Three Rings" in Lessing's play "Nathan the Wise". To agree to disagree may seem to be a quite reconciling attitude, not only in interpersonal relationships.

The remaining two contributions deal with Indonesia. Ahmad Syafii Maarif describes the genesis of Pancasila, which has been developed over a long period of time as the ideological basis of religious pluralism in Indonesia. Coexistence is hereby assured for Catholics, Protestants, Hindus, Buddhists and Confucianists in the 235 million strong nation in Southeast Asia. Maarif even goes so far as to conclude that "believers should not only cooperate among themselves, but should also be ready to coexist with and accommodate non-believers and even atheists, and vice versa". Again, it is the appraisal of the "courage to re-think and re-examine the Qur'an more contextually and freshly", which assures progress for Islamic civilizations, according to Maarif. Next, Ulrich Klingshirn expands the portrayal of Indonesia by depicting the positive role of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) as the largest Islamic mass organization in Southeast Asia. The focus here lies also with the role of NU as a political player in Indonesia, which assures the implementation of the Pancasila throughout the country. But even despite the success of the Pancasila, which culturally and socially amalgamates Islamic, Javanese and Indonesian traditions, hardline extremist groups are challenging the status quo by striving for an anti-modernist and archaic social order of a bygone era.

The experiences in Indonesia may be an interesting aspect which could enrich the current dialogue between the civilizations and the Islam Dialogue in Germany. But even if the dogmatic discourse does not progress, the interpretation of the sources constitutes an ample opportunity for attaining social harmony in a multi-religious society.

Notes

1 The publication contains papers presented at a roundtable discussion on the topic "Religious Pluralism – Islam and Christianity in the 21st Century" that was held by the Hanns Seidel Foundation, Institute for International Contact and Cooperation (ICC), on 29 July 2010 in Munich. The papers of Philipp W. Hildmann and Ulrich Klingshirn have been added as contributions from additional project work by the Hanns Seidel Foundation in Germany and Indonesia. ICC is grateful for the publication of the papers in the series Studies & Comments.

2 Monotheistic religions accepted by Islam.
1. Europe at the crossroads

Relations between the different religious communities in Europe are of crucial significance both for the peaceful coexistence of its people in its democratic structures and for the continent as a whole as it grows together. The dialogue between Christians and Muslims plays a prominent role in this context.

The religious map of Europe is still overwhelmingly Christian: today, about 80% of the European Union's population adhere to Christianity while only about 2% are Muslim. However, in the medium term, the latter constitute a population group which is growing at a rate above the average. There are currently between 3.8 and 4.3 million Muslims living in Germany. This corresponds to 4.6% and 5.2% respectively of the total population. In the year 2030, there will be an estimated seven million Muslims. As Germany's population is both decreasing and aging, this will amount to 10% of this migration country's total population. In large and middle-sized urban areas, they will constitute up to a third of the area’s population. Given this development, the setting of Germany's and Europe's political agenda in the future will be marked by the self-image of Islam and its attitude towards other religions and non-Muslim state communities. The clarification of issues relating to this is an indispensable requirement for the successful coexistence between Christians and Muslims and also for the social integration of fellow Muslim citizens into the European community of values.

The dialogue with Islam comprises different problem areas and in order to be successful, it has to take place on different levels. In this context, the dialogue between the state and its Muslim population is a priority. For Germany, this means that the Muslim population has to acknowledge the constitution of Germany; a constitution that lays claim to be the basic legal order of the country's community and to be the legal framework of state life.

Up to now, this acknowledgement does not seem to be a matter of course. In the year 2007, a study initiated by the Ministry of the Interior with the title "Muslims in Germany" revealed some worrying results: 40% of the adult Muslims interviewed and 44% of Muslim students stated that they adhere to a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam and that they reject Western values. More than 21% of these students also stated that the use of violence is justified when it serves the spread and enforcement of Islam. According to the study, more than 44% of the country's total Muslim population shares the opinion that Muslims dying in the course of armed struggle for their faith will go to heaven. A quarter of the young Muslims show anti-Semitic and anti-Christian prejudices as well as a strong opposition to democracy. More than 10% would welcome the implementation of corporal punishment for certain crimes, as in Islamic law. How compatible are these views with the free and democratic system of the Federal Republic of Germany?

On the part of the Muslims who are organized in associations (with 22% only a minority, but an important dialogue partner for the government), the acknowledgement of the
constitution is also not as clear as it is desired by the government. The 2009 report of the Bavarian Office for the Protection of the Constitution, for instance, classified the activities of the Islamic Community Milli Görüş (IGMG) and the Islamic Community in Germany e.V. (IGD) as aimed against the free and democratic system of the Federal Republic of Germany. This has had an effect on the two major umbrella organizations, the Islam Council for the Federal Republic of Germany e.V. (IR), whose biggest member organization is the IGMG, and the Central Council of Muslims in Germany e.V. (ZMD), which is affiliated with the IGD. The rules of the internal procedures of the Coordination Council for Muslims in Germany (KRM), the central association of the four largest Muslim organizations (among others also the one with the most members, the Turkish-Islamic Union of the Institute for Religion (DITIB) also give rise to doubts. This document dated 28 March 2007 states in paragraph 1, section 4: "The Coordination Council acknowledges the free and democratic system of the Federal Republic of Germany". However, the following section 5 of the same paragraph states without further elaboration: "Koran and Sunna of the prophet Muhammad are the foundations of the Coordination Council. This principle must not be altered or abandoned through changes of the rules of internal procedures".

This example is paradigmatic for the importance of conducting a dialogue with the Muslim population on a theological-philosophical level. It requires theological-philosophical expertise in order to fathom the problematic area of how the unchangeable commitment to Koran and Sunna in section 5 affects the confession for the free and democratic system in section 4. Can the two sections be at all congruent? Or does section 5 degrade the confession of section 4 to mere lip service? What does it mean when the two most important sources of Islamic law (Koran and Sunna) are declared as the foundation of a central association which claims to organize the representation of the Muslims in Germany and to be the major point of contact in politics and society?

These questions which constantly arise and which have an explosive potential particularly in the area of demographic development, make one thing very clear: it is not enough to simply combat prejudices and fears superficially in order to develop mutual trust. It is important to lay the foundations for a society where tolerance can depend on meeting tolerance, without the danger of being ambushed by intolerance when the balance of power shifts. The interreligious dialogue between Muslims and Christians can, and is obliged to, achieve decisive changes. This is emphasized by the fact that all political, social and economical efforts for a positive coexistence imply theological-philosophical problems, both explicitly and implicitly. These problems are pre-eminent in the strongest sense of the word. They are rooted in the spiritual, cultural and religious guidelines of the respective faith community and must therefore be approached primarily on the scientific, intellectual level of a dialogue which is theological and philosophical. Whether all the other efforts will have lasting success will ultimately depend on success in clarifying these basic positions in order to attain a successful dialogue on an intellectual level. The requirements and preconditions for such a dialogue will be considered in the following sections.

2. The dilemma of the claim to absolute truth

Is a dialogue between Christianity and Islam at all possible in principle? A dialogue that goes beyond the point of merely exchanging unchangeable points of view? This question is more complex than it seems at first sight. The interreligious dialogue is a dialogue between believers. Both Christianity as well as Islam consider themselves to
be a revealed religion. One of the characteristics of a revealed religion is the claim to absolute truth with reference to God. If the revealed religion ever doubted this claim, this would be equal to it renouncing itself. Under this premise, even compromises are excluded. There is no alternative or margin between acceptance and rejection. From a Christian point of view, there might be nuances in its relation towards other religions, depending on how one defines the claim to absoluteness (either the superiority of Christianity or its exclusiveness). However, the fact remains that the ideas of a fundamental equality and the relativity of religions are incompatible with the claim to absoluteness. Truth can neither be relativized nor is it negotiable. In his book "The Natural History of Religion" of 1757, the Scottish philosopher David Hume (and later also the German Egyptologist Jan Assmann in a brilliant manner) elaborated on the immanent intolerance of monotheistic religions. According to Hume and Assman, these religions have to be downright intolerant. In other words, they have to clearly define what they consider as incompatible with their truths, if these truths are to have the life-shaping authority, normativity and obligation that they claim for themselves. What should be the end purpose of a dialogue between two revealed religions that are perfectly intolerant and each have their own claim to absoluteness, particularly considering the fact that both compete in their respective absolute, revealed and metaphysical religious truth with reference to revelation and salvation?

The frequent citation that Christianity and Islam are both Abrahamic religions and that they are based on the same roots and share the belief in one God does not necessarily offer a solution. On the contrary, the shared reference to one God increases the tension: whenever one of the two religions – in the name of the shared ground – claims to represent the truth of the one God, it automatically becomes the uncompromising competitor of the other religion. No matter how one looks at it: religious confessions and convictions cannot be seamlessly congruent. Both Christians and Muslims will have to adhere to the differentiation between right and wrong and to clear definitions of what they consider as incompatible with their convictions when the believers still claim strength and depth for their creed.

Unfortunately, European history confirms this issue of the failed dialogue. An amicable coexistence of Christians and Muslims was always a rare exception on this continent. In this context, one of the most persistent myths is the legend of a peaceful interreligious dialogue under the 800-year long Arab-Islamic rule in Spain which allegedly brought forth the occidental rationalism. This legend is being kept alive by UNESCO, Al-Qaida, the Muslim Brotherhood as well as the Spanish government. Spanish Arabists, however, feel nothing but shame for their own country in the face of this enthusiasm for Arabs. However, this historic fact is being consistently ignored by adherents of this myth.

Even beyond the borders of Al-Andalus, the norm was not coexistence, but the conflict of the religions – culminating in cruel wars which were led by the political interests of the respective nations and parties. Even doctrinal controversies within one religion were often decided by violent means. In the Thirty Years War, a succinct inner-Christian example, about one third of the continent's population was killed in the first half of the 17th century. All these conflicts were also claiming to defend the right faith. They were understood as a struggle for the absolute truth and hence also as a fight for the one God. With reference to this highest entity, all borders of humanity were torn down. Blind fanaticism was (and in some parts today still is) considered as a commendable doctrine both in Christianity and Islam.
3. Secular rationality as a basis for relations

So what could be a possible solution for the dilemma of the dual claim to absolute truth? The solution has to be found extra muros, in a neutral location outside of the strongholds of the respective faiths. If a fruitful dialogue between the different religious convictions of Christians and Muslims is to take place at all, a mediating position is required. This mediating position must be free from all religious ties and obligations and accepted and respected by all partners in dialogue. This basis for relations can only be secular rationality.

Thus, before any other individual issues of interreligious dialogue can be considered, the basic question must be this: how can a revealed religion be compatible with secular rationality? In this context, there is no need to worry about the revealed religions. The adherents of a faith community usually never fundamentally question the revealed truth of their respective faith. Instead, the autonomy of the natural rationality compared to the supernatural revelation is much more important; since a philosophy which has adapted itself to the respective religion and been absorbed by it is worthless from a theological standpoint. Only an independent and autonomous philosophy can have the role of a critical instance to a revealed religion. Only such a philosophy can offer the religions a neutral venue for dialogue extra muros, thus enabling them to take part in the dialogue. The interreligious dialogue requires the reflection of the respective faith towards its own relation towards rationality. A faith which does not reflect on itself and its own relation towards rationality (which can only happen with reason), a faith which is unwilling to be questioned and to justify itself, will inevitably lead to a fundamentalism which is unable to take part in the dialogue.

There are some positive indications for the emergence of secular rationality in the inter-religious dialogue. In Catholicism, Pope John Paul II had already set the course with the publication in 1998 of his encyclical "Fides et Ratio". In this opus, he stated that the Catholic Church adheres to its conviction that faith and rationality can mutually aid each other by conducting a critical self-examination as well as by encouraging each other on the path to a deeper understanding. His successor, Pope Benedict XVI, has no less a clear opinion on this matter, as could be witnessed during his speech in Regensburg, Germany, on 12 September 2006: "Not acting rationally is against the nature of God".

As result of the quotation of Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos, this speech in Regensburg created quite a stir in the Muslim world. However, at the same time it promoted the process of an interreligious dialogue which led to a common statement by Catholics and (Iranian) Shiites on 1 May 2008. The first three basic principles of this interreligious document, written with impressive clarity, are: "1. Faith and rationality are both gifts from God to mankind. 2. Faith and rationality do not contradict each other, but faith can sometimes stand above rationality but never stand against it. 3. Faith and rationality in itself are not violent. Neither rationality nor faith should be abused for acts of violence; unfortunately, both occasionally are abused for this end". Pars pro toto, the signs for an integration of a critical rationality in the interreligious dialogue on the Muslim side seem to be promising. Moreover, between the 10th and the 12th century, the Muslim world already experienced a philosophical empowerment of the faith, even though these approaches at that time could not develop further, and a sustainable process of a spiritual debate and a scientific differentiation could not be established.

For Europe, this only leaves the Protestant position on the Christian side. It has always had a highly reflected and rather relaxed attitude towards rationality. Here too it was
the Regensburg speech by the Pope (which radically criticized the Protestant theology; however, due to the Muslim frenzy of indignation this criticism was not particularly noticed), provoked an answer by the then President of the Council of the German Protestant Church. This answer once more gave a clear position on the relation between faith and rationality from a Protestant point of view. It proposes an alliance of faith and rationality which lives on both the differentiation between faith and rationality as well as the readiness to relate to each other, rather than to play off against each other. "From the very beginning, the connection between faith and rationality has been a significant characteristic of Protestantism. A rationality which has not been illuminated by faith remains inexperienced and unenlightened because it does not account for outside its borders. A faith which has not been enlightened by rationality bears the risk of becoming barbaric and violent. Instead, it is imperative to frequently unfold anew the interdependence of rationality and faith." This was stated by Wolfgang Huber in his Berlin speech on 20 November 2007.

So secular rationality could be both respected and accepted as a neutral venue for dialogue extra muros by Christian and Muslim dialogue partners. At least, this is suggested by the expression of a positive basic attitude towards rationality as a critically cleansing examiner of the faith, and as a divine gift to mankind. Thus, the common ground is defined. But what are the issues that we have to focus on when it comes to the basis for relations?

In the context of these thoughts on the requirements for an interreligious dialogue, it becomes clear that it is primarily not a matter of arbitrary inner-religious issues with a strictly theological character. Neither is it a matter of theological-philosophical exercises in a scientific ivory tower of intellectual vanities, which could be deliberated (without any damage to society) without the need to arrive at any definite conclusions. Theological-philosophical problems of a highly explosive socio-political nature are being debated.

With reference to the questions outlined at the beginning of this article and the expected demographic developments, the result of these reflections will not be limited to theology. They will lay the groundwork for the peaceful coexistence of Christians and Muslims in Germany and Europe, and will also guarantee the continuation of this coexistence after a shift in power. Or the opposite will happen. In this case, they will show the limits of our coexistence and subsequently force the government (regardless of its sense of freedom and openness) to create barriers which will prevent the Muslims from stepping directly or indirectly out of their position as a minority within the state.

A central focus for these considerations could very well be the concept of the fundamental value of human dignity which is enshrined in the German Constitution and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Furthermore, there are at least three crucial topics which will at the outset play a decisive role from a theological-philosophical standpoint as to whether interreligious dialogue will take place or not take place: the question concerning the human being, God, and hermeneutics: the interpretation of texts.

4. The question concerning the human being

The answer to the question about the human being has its ultimate reference point in the concept of personhood. Is the human being to be understood as a person, which means that he is inviolable in his uniqueness and dignity and, due to his freedom of conscience, has to be acknowledged as a moral
subject? Or is the human being a mere specimen of the human species and therefore subordinate to the general population even to the extent that society can deny him his right to exist? The answers to these questions have a direct effect on each individual's position within a faith community: if the human being is a person, then faith is an act of personal freedom and must therefore not be enforced.

A glance at the course of the debate regarding this topic shows that there are no apparent compelling reasons for interpreting the human being the one way or the other. The conviction that the human being holds a privileged and higher position is by no means self-evident and has slowly evolved through the differentiation and dissociation from other species in the course of the history of mankind. The mere existence of the human being does not provide us with any information about human nature. To be human generally leaves room for various interpretations. However, this freedom of interpretation is not synonymous with an arbitrariness that does not permit further questioning. Secular rationality offers a distinctive feature – insofar as the human is able to make this freedom of interpretation a part of his contemplations. The human being is a creature that can and does question himself. He is able to reflect critically upon himself. The human being differs in this ability from all that surrounds him. Beyond the sensual experience, this mental recognition opens a new horizon and, along with that, new possibilities for interpreting what it means to be human.

However, an absolute clarity about how the characteristics of the human being are determined cannot be reached solely by these means. In additional to reason-based reflection, religious experiences also have to be integrated into the thoughts. From a Christian point of view, the ontological position of personality and subjectivity has its ultimate justification in the apprehension of the human being in the sense of the Christian-Jewish tradition. According to this tradition, the individual human being does not just randomly exist. His individuality is desired by God and for this reason he contains the meaning of his existence within himself. He is not (at least not primarily) a functional element in a superior community, but he exists for his own sake and, according to this definition, is free of any instrumentalization. The possibility of personal completion beyond death is based on this divine purpose of creation. The human being is capable of such completion because he does not just exist, but he is also aware of himself through reflection. This knowledge of oneself deeply justifies the possibility of personal completion. The fact that the human being acts on his own initiative and on his own responsibility has its origin in this thought. Ontologically, that is why being a person and subjectivity are the highest-ranking attributes of the whole reality of the human being.

In ethics, the self-referentiality of the person has its pendant in the teachings of the free conscience, and also in the freedom of the conscience to err subjectively, as the last instance of moral action. As a finite subject, the human being will not be measured by an absolute dimension which cannot be grasped by him. His finite rationality and his finite volition are related to each other. His morality is measured by the quality of this relation. Volition must follow the insight, even if there is the risk that this insight finds itself in an unavoidable error. This is why the human being (particularly when it comes to faith issues) must not be subjected to any kind of coercion. God has irrevocably linked the human being to his conscience. In the eyes of God, the human being constitutes himself as a moral subject, and from this relation stems his inviolable dignity.

At this point, the crucial and fundamental significance of the human being for politics and society becomes clear. The question
whether the human being is a person or just a specimen of the human species has a direct effect on the question of the conditions for a democracy, of the scope of human rights, and of freedom of conscience and religion. What answer does Islamic theology give to the question about the human being in Europe in the beginning of the 21st century? The term person, which stems from Christian tradition, is still a rather strange one to Muslims even today. Despite this, will Islamic theology be able to accept the idea of secular rationality – as the basis of relations – in order to define its perspective on personhood and the subjectivity of the human being?

5. The question of God

A second issue that is essential for an interreligious dialogue from a theological-philosophical point of view is the question of God. Who or what God is, and whether and how He can or must be understood and grasped as such, determines what the world and the human being are in principle.

The fact that the question of God plays a central role in interreligious dialogue is self-evident. In this regard, there seem to be no significant differences at first glance between Christianity and Islam. Both Christians and Muslims share the common basic belief that the world is not eternal, but that it was created by God. Both Christians and Muslims are monotheists, meaning that both only believe in the one God – whereas it should be a matter of course that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity does not question belief in only one God, as it is often assumed from the Muslim point of view in the references to Sura 4, 171 and Sura 5, 73.

This, then, is a first glimpse that reveals the commonalities as an important basis for communication on controversial issues. The problems that arise at a second glance, namely the immanent and absolute claim to truth by both monotheistic religions, have already been mentioned. Furthermore, a potentially far more serious difference emerges concerning the understanding of God from both the Christian and Muslim point of view, one with far-reaching consequences well beyond the theological discourse.

In Christian tradition, the nature of the Triune God as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer is often characterized as love, with reference to 1 John: 4. In Christian belief, God is love, or to be more exact: unconditional and implicit love. It is regrettable that this central message has gone unnoticed for centuries in both words and deeds. However, this is not an argument against the joyful message or against this Gospel in the best sense of the word. The response to the love from God towards the human being cannot be enforced. The human being has to – in a positive or negative way – answer for it independently and freely before God. For this reason, we can rightfully use the term of the theonomic autonomy of the human being.

The image of God in Islam appears to be more ambiguous in this regard. There are distinct approaches according to which the monotheism in the Koran is to be understood as a monocracy. This view has serious consequences for the independence of the human being because under these circumstances, it is impossible for him to exist as an autonomous entity. All personal initiatives of the human being de facto are lost under the monocracy of God. All powers of decision and leading remain exclusively with God who is also responsible for the decisions made by the human being. In this case, the appeal to one's conscience appears to be an open contradiction of God, whose commands have to be followed unconditionally. God is the master of the worlds, and the human being finds himself in the position of His servant who is expected to surrender to His will. Therefore, the fact that Islam focuses on right action (oriented
towards the positive revelation) rather than on the right insight is internally consistent.

In the face of this significantly different emphasis in the concept of God, the proposed Abrahamic commonalities of the Christian and Muslim monotheism lose more of their binding and sustainable power. The socio-political consequences which arise from this image of God should be considered very carefully, as this theological approach may influence social structures because the self-image of the human being is directly affected by this approach. The demand for a theocracy, for the identity of religion and politics, is merely the last but entirely consistent stage in this scheme.

However, this does not mean that this image of God, the human being and the state from an Islamic point of view must necessarily be so. In this regard, the Pakistani scholar Daud Rahbar undertook in his book "God of Justice" published in 1960 an attempt at a systematic redevelopment of the theology which derives immediately from the Koran and which describes the God in the Koran as an entirely ethical entity that holds the free human being morally responsible for his actions. However, the afore-mentioned mainstream image of God in Islam still has to be taken seriously as a danger, particularly in regard to democracy. For this reason, from the Islamic point of view, the question whether Islamic theology today still unswervingly clings to a monocratic monotheism – with all consequences for freedom of conscience and faith as well as for religion and politics – has to be answered before the interreligious dialogue begins. In this case, the question must be allowed as to the end purpose of an interreligious dialogue in the framework of our free and democratic system. Also, the question must be posed whether Islamic theology is inherently capable of defining a much broader image of God. This possibility too seems to be permitted by the Koran, given the appropriate exegesis. This leads us to the third complex of themes: the question of hermeneutics, i.e. the branch of theology that deals with exegesis, the interpretation of sacred texts.

6. The question of hermeneutics

Sooner or later all the revealed religions have had to face the issue of the right interpretation of the revealed truth and how the religious truths were presented in writing. Therefore, the question as to how binding are its sources for Islam appears to be a rather unoriginal but nevertheless very difficult one. Islam claims three sources for its religion: Koran, Sunna and consensus. After being only one of many sources in the early days, the Koran today without doubt has the prime position within the hierarchy of sources. For the religious Muslim, the proclamations and the teachings of the prophet Muhammad are documented in this holy book. The Koran contains the immediate word of God, unaltered by any authority. It is identical with the original text which is preserved in heaven, and for this reason it must claim absolute authority. The literal comprehension of the Koran is widespread in the Islamic world. Such an understanding of divine revelation naturally poses problems for its relationship to human rationality, as it denies any kind of interpretation. Difficulties arise not only for Islamic theology in consequence of this understanding of the Koran, but also for the dialogue partners of Islamic theologians. This is why hermeneutics plays an important role in the interreligious dialogue.

A literal interpretation of the Koran contains – and there is no other way to describe it – an absolute rejection of Western values. When considering a literal and verbally inspired understanding of the Koran as the word of God, one finds many statements which are unacceptable, both from the point of view of Christian theology and from the point of view of an enlightened and democratic state. For instance, the generalized
condemnation of infidels (from an Islamic point of view) and the command to kill them wherever they are encountered can never be subject to debate.

However, this situation appears in a completely different light when the historico-critical method is applied also to the normative texts and the binding traditions – a method of interpretation which is already practiced by several significant Islamic theologians such as the thinkers Fazlur Rahman or Muhammad Arkoun, to mention just two. And today, for instance, the theological faculty of Ankara University is known for its time-sensitive and contextual interpretations of the Koran. And so there does exist a position within the Islamic world which states that in order to retain the substance of the faith, one does not have to propagate literal interpretations, but the substance of the faith can be linked to a contemporary translation of the Koran. However, the fact that this approach does not (yet) meet acceptance among the prevailing majority of Muslim intellectuals cannot be overlooked. Nevertheless, the Muslim world faces the challenge of developing a new theory of the Koran. In this regard, the opportunity lies in a readiness to base one's criticism of the wording of the holy book on an understanding of the spirit behind it. The resulting debate within the actual community is inevitable and has to be conducted productively.

The fact is that only interlocutors who share this hermeneutic basic attitude can lead such a dialogue which is both useful and oriented to the future. A step in the right direction in this area is the previously cited common declaration of Catholics and Shites of 1 May 2008, which closes with the seventh paragraph as follows: "Religious traditions cannot be evaluated on the basis of a single verse or passage of the respective holy book. Both an overall view and an adequate hermeneutic method are required for a fair comprehension".

7. The ultimate reference point: human dignity

The question about the human being, about God, and about hermeneutics – the answers to these three questions will decide whether it will be at all possible to initiate a meaningful interreligious dialogue between Christians and Muslims from a theological-philosophical perspective. In other words, only those Muslims who can answer these questions in the way outlined above can be reasonably expected to be partners in dialogue for the Christian side, if this dialogue is to be more than a mere exchange of viewpoints which are set in stone.

The importance of such a dialogue for the peaceful coexistence of the people in Germany and Europe does not require any further justification in the light of the demographic developments mentioned above. Everything depends on a positive outcome of this dialogue. Today's coexistence of Muslims and Christians in Germany and Europe, which is mostly characterized by mistrust, must be overcome in the interest of maintaining social peace. The current situation contains a conflict potential, the political consequences of which can be scarcely imagined today. It is a matter of urgency that this situation be changed. The interreligious dialogue can contribute significantly to this cause. However, it can only show us paths and bridges. But it is up to the individual whether these paths are followed or bridges crossed. "The dialogue is open and indeterminate in its nature", stated Christian Wulff, who in the meantime has become President of Germany, during a speech on 14 January 2005, "in the same way that the core of every religion is indefinable, intangible, even inexpressible, and as such simply mysterious, sacred, and transcendent in its nature. And yet the dialogue which takes place in society still strives to find solutions which are politically and legally acceptable for our everyday life and circumstances".
The ultimate reference point for all of the considerations in this respect must be the fundamental central value of human dignity. The success of the entire dialogue project will depend (also socially and politically) on whether both sides agree without any reservation and on the basis of their respective theological self-understanding on at least this one point: the inviolability of the dignity of the human being, regardless of nationality or faith, must be accepted and permanently guaranteed, with all the resulting consequences.

The constitutions of the individual European states must safeguard this, as must the respective religious communities as well as their members living in these countries. The unconditional acceptance of the central fundamental value of human dignity is the precondition for the possibility of a humane coexistence of all peoples. All other attempts and efforts are doomed to failure if the religious communities in Europe do not manage to reach a common position on the basis of their respective theologies.

Nevertheless, it must be stated objectively that the only possible option is a dialogue between Christians and Muslims which is founded on secular rationality as the basis for relations. However, the line of argument in favour of this does not necessarily imply that this path will be followed, even though reason would suggest that it should. Dialogue is an opportunity which has to be taken freely and brought to realization in freedom. However, this very same freedom means that such an opportunity can also be rejected.

There will always be individuals among Christians and Muslims who, by rejecting rationality, will claim that their faith is the greater one, and will feel obliged to follow the word of God literally and without reservation. It is not every believer who has arrived at the insight that reason and faith need not mutually exclude and contradict each other since both have their origin in God.

Although such a synthesis is reasonable, it is often the case that people who are searching for an understanding of the revealed truth find themselves confronted by tendencies which refuse to allow any questioning of revelation. For this reason, there will always be some believers for whom the relationship of religion and rationality cannot be reconciled and will remain conflicted. However, this section of the religious community should not be considered an obstacle but rather an incentive for all the others to persevere in searching and leading the interreligious dialogue between Christians and Muslims.

This is the only way that Europe will be able to grow together and that its peoples will be able to coexist in peace within the framework of the democratic structures of this continent.
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Erdal Toprakyaran

1. Pluralism in the Qur'an

The Qur'an contains many verses that support religious pluralism. If asked by the Christians and Jews what they believe in, the Muslims in Mecca should say to them: "We believe what has been sent down to us, and we believe what has been sent to you. Our God and your God is one, and to Him we submit" (29/46). In another verse God says: "We have sent revelations to you as We sent revelations to Noah and the prophets who came after him; and We sent revelations to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and their offspring, and to Jesus and Job ... and to Moses God spoke directly" (4/163-164). The Qur'an states that God deliberately made humanity into different religions, races and tribes so that they may know one another (30/22-29 and 49/13) and compete with one another (2/148 and 5/48).

Rather than abolishing diversity, those passages encourage Muslims to accept differences and to handle them peacefully. Many Muslim scholars also point to two Qur'anic titles given to all people as a sign that God confers dignity on all of humanity: one title is "Children of Adam" (17/70) and the other title is "deputy" (khalifa, 2/30), which means that every human being has the potential to become a deputy of God on earth. Furthermore, the Qur'an forbids religious oppression of any kind, for example in verse 2/256 where God says that there is no compulsion in religion (see also verse 10/99-100).

The Qur'an contains the expression "People / Family of the Book" (ahl al-kitab), a term which is crucial for the understanding of the idea of Islamic pluralism. The Qur'an states that there are other religious communities which enjoy a special relationship with Muslims because they share a common tie to both monotheism and divine revelation that is believed to come from the same transcendent "Mother Book" (umm al-kitab). The Qur'an recognizes the potential for salvation for these followers of other religions, e.g. in verse 2/62, which states: "Those who believe – the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabaeans – whosoever believe in God and the Last Day and do good works, they shall have their reward from their Lord and shall have nothing to fear, nor shall they come to grief" (see also 5/44-46, 5/69 and 29/46).

There are also negative statements about polytheists, Christians and Jews in the Qur'an. But an analysis of the historical context of these passages shows that these verses are always revealed in times of hostility and are therefore not decisive for times of peace. The passage which is probably the most cited is the beginning of verse 2/191, which states: "And slay them wherever you catch them". But the previous verse: "Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for Allah does not love aggressors", makes it obvious that this verse is the result of a warlike situation, namely a conflict between the Muslims and the polytheistic leaders of Mecca in the year 628. In that year the Muslims wanted to do the pilgrimage to the Ka'ba and were hindered by the Meccans. The Muslims expected a fight, but that was prevented through a treaty which allowed the Muslims to return without doing the pilgrimage that year, but gave them the right to do it the following year. Apart from these times of aggression, the Muslims always have to strive after peace:

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"God may change the animosity between you and them into love. God is Omnipotent. God is Forgiver, Most Merciful. God forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for your faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loves those who are just". In the verse 16/125-127 it is mentioned how the Prophet Muhammad should speak with people of other faiths: "You shall invite to the path of your Lord with wisdom and kind enlightenment and debate with them in the best possible manner" (see also 17/53).2

2. Practice of the Muslims

From early times on pluralism has existed in the Muslim community because of the very clear regulations of the Qur'an. But from the viewpoint of modern times and standards, these practices seem to be limited. At this point, for example, the constitution of Medina must be mentioned. It was initiated by the Prophet Muhammad after his migration from Mecca to Medina in the year 622. This document is one of the first known political documents in the world which mentions religious freedom. It arranged the cohabitation of Muslims, Jews and polytheists, who are defined there as one community (umma).3

From the time of the Prophet, the non-Muslims were expected to be loyal to the Muslim government and to pay a special tax (jizya) if they could. In return, they were freed or respectfully excluded from military service. On the other hand, if they could do so, the Muslims had to pay a special tax for Muslims (zakat), so there was no financial disadvantage for the non-Muslims.

The Muslims guaranteed the basic rights of the non-Muslims, whom they called protected religious minorities (ahl al-dhimma or dhimmi). These rights included the right to live, to have property and to practice freely their own religion; it included also the right to have their own religious civil law and civil courts. There are many sayings (hadith) of the Prophet Muhammad concerning the dhimmis, for example the one delivered by Abu Dawud: "Whoever harms a dhimmi, will be my enemy". After a while, in addition to Christians and Jews, other religious groups not mentioned in the Qur'an also came to be regarded as protected minorities, e. g. Samaritans, Zoroastrians, and later after the death of the Prophet even Hindus and Buddhists.4

3. Changeability of religious principles

It must be emphasized that it is not the main Islamic source – the Qur'an – that has changed over the centuries, but the many interpretations of its texts. And the interpretations are always dependent on the historical context, whether political, social, financial, or other. There were and still are many different law schools like the Hanafiyya, Shafi'iyya, Malikiyya, Hanbaliyya or Ja'fariyya; theological schools like the Salafiyya, Mu'taziliyya, Ash'ariyya or Maturidiyya; mystical brotherhoods like the Qadiriyya, Chishtiyya, Naqshbandiyya or Mawlawiyya and hundreds of political dynasties like the Umayyads, Abbasids, Ayyubids or Ottomans. It is possible to ascertain tendencies, but it is not possible to say that these schools and dynasties were as a whole pluralistic or as a whole anti-pluralistic. It did not depend primarily on the existing theoretical concepts of the Islamic scholars but on the historical context whether an actor, a school or a dynasty was more or less pluralistic.5

Four examples will be presented which illustrate that Muslim history – as every history – is process-like, complex and multifaceted.

The first example is the case of the Mogul sultans in India, who were all Sunni Mus-
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Islamic history is full of examples of mystics who had nevertheless an anti-pluralistic attitude and were involved in worldly and political actions and trends. But on the other hand, there were and still are many Sufis who correspond to their widespread positive image of being very open-minded and tolerant. Examples of such mystics include Mu'ın al-Din Chishiti (d. 1230), Ibn al-Arabi (d. 1240), Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273), Hajji Bayram Veli (d. 1429) or Hazrat Inayat Khan (d. 1927).

The third example is the case of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Well integrated and very successful, the Armenians had enjoyed their basic rights for many centuries, as had all minorities in the Ottoman Empire. They were even called the "trustworthy people" (millet-i sadık) by the Turkish government. But the misrule of the Ottoman sultans and governments, many wars, a financial crisis and nationalistic trends in Europe and the Middle East destabilized the Empire in the 19th century. This situation led first to the characterization of the Armenians as the "unwanted traitors" and then to the appalling deportation and massacre in 1915 during World War I. It was not religious fanaticism or the changing of religious concepts, but complete political failure and collapse which culminated in this disaster. This example shows that within a few decades or centuries a limited pluralistic system can turn into a fanatic system, and vice versa.

The fourth example is again intrinsically connected to the previous example. When Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (d. 1938) and his companions founded the Turkish Republic in 1923, many secularist reforms followed. The reformers wanted to create a modern state that had to "turn its face from the East to the West". Atatürk succeeded in a very short time with his reforms, which included banishing the sultanate and caliphate, the mystical brotherhoods, the Islamic courts and the full-body veil; abandoning the Ara-
bic language as the "dominant" language of religious teaching; and the replacement of Arabic script with Latin script.

At first glance these reforms may seem to be anti-Islamic. But upon closer examination it becomes clear that the reforms were seen by many religious scholars as absolutely compatible with Islamic principles. Atatürk was always concerned to have the approval of the religious establishment, through such measures as positive expert reports (fatwa). For this reason, he was aided by numerous Islamic scholars in order to provide the reforms with an Islamic fundament.

The reforms would not have been possible without the support of such eminent Muslim scholars as Mehmet Seyyit (d. 1925), Rifat Börekçi (first president of the department for religious affairs, d. 1941), Şerafettin Yaltkaya (second president of the department for religious affairs, d. 1947), Kamil Miras (d. 1957) and Şemsettin Günaltay (later became Turkish Prime Minister, d. 1961) who explained to the people why issues such as democracy, secularism, pluralism, the Latin alphabet, or modern clothing did not contradict Islam in any way.

The secularist reforms also took place under the patronage of such eminent Turkish Sufis as Mehmet Ali Ayni (d. 1943), Remzi Akyürek (d. 1944), Neyzen Tevfik (d. 1953), Veled Çelebi (d. 1953), Kenan Rifai (d. 1950), Hasan Ali Yücel (d. 1961), Süheyl Ünver (d. 1986) and Samih Rifat (d. 1988), even despite the fact that Atatürk had also abolished the organized Sufi Brotherhoods.

This last case makes clear yet again that historical actors (whether sultan, scholar, farmer or mystic) – even if they belong to the same school of law, brotherhood or family – can be found on both sides of two competing parties like the Islamic Ottoman sultanate and the secularist reformers around Atatürk. The choices they made and their attitudes towards traditionalism, modernism or secularism depended more on their own individual life experiences and historical, social, political, or economic circumstances, than on theoretical concepts.

4. Contemporary situation and discussion

There have been and there still continue to be innumerable different perceptions, concepts, voices and interpretations of pluralism in the Muslim world.

More progressive contemporary Muslim scholars like Fathi Osman and Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid from Egypt, Farid Esack from South Africa, Nurcholish Majid from Indonesia, Asghar Ali Engineer from India, or Süleyman Ateş and Salih Akdemir from Turkey argue that the Qur'an supports the development of universal relations and global pluralism and justice, including not only Jews and Christians, but also Hindus, Buddhists, and people of other faiths and even people without a faith.

For them, pluralism is a Qur'anic obligation. But God's original vision of a peaceful pluralism for humanity has been corrupted over time by scholars and rulers who sought to promote and legitimize their own interests and the exploitation of the people. They believe that the honour and dignity of man must be assured through guarantees of freedom of faith and expression for all people. Most of these scholars consider that the early Muslim practices such as the dhimmi status and the jizya tax, however advanced they may have been at the time of the Prophet, are no longer appropriate for modern times because they constitute second-class citizenship and a limited form of pluralism and tolerance. Many of them argue that the word Islam (surrender) does not only denominate the historical religion which started with Muhammad but also the one.
superordinate meta-religion, which is the essence of all religions.

As a result of this line of argument, all the prophets including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad are called in the Qur'an Muslims, that is to say: followers of Islam. Since the Qur'an recognizes that true faith can exist in forms other than the historical Islam which started with Muhammad, those scholars argue that the important issue of faith is whether a person is sincere in his or her faith and engages in righteous conduct, not whether he or she believes in the prophecy of Muhammad.

Unfortunately, there are also radical voices such as those of the Taliban, Hizbullah, Hamas or Al-Qaida, who instrumentalize and exploit the negative verses about Jews and Christians in the Qur'an, without any consideration for the historical context of these revelations. But it is a known fact that these groups are the result of the historical, that is to say, the political and economic circumstances of their region. If, for example, the political and economic circumstances in countries such as Palestine, Afghanistan, or Iraq could be stabilized, the influence of these groups and the hatred against the US and Israel would certainly decrease.

It is important to realize that even the radical groups here mentioned never say that they are fighting against Christians and Jews because they are Christians and Jews. They always argue that they are fighting them because they are oppressors of the Muslims. This shows that even these radicals know that the Qur'an allows no hate and violence against peaceful followers of other religions.

In conclusion, it can be appropriate to cite a quintessential episode from the life of Ahmad Syafii Maarif, the former leader of the Indonesian Muhammadiyah movement. In his autobiography he writes that he used to be a fundamentalist, keen to convert non-Muslims to Islam. But after studying with the eminent scholar Fazlur Rahman he was able to depart from "the path of fundamentalism which was filled with flaming spirit but empty of deep, contemplative thoughts".

Ahmad Syafii Maarif is today one of the major champions of Islamic pluralism in the world. This wonderful transformation story offers hope that it is possible to convert many especially young fundamentalists to a peaceful Islam. But this requires scholars like Fazlur Rahman, and policy-makers with courage and a profound sense of responsibility.
Notes


2 This example makes clear the importance of a historical-critical reading of holy texts. Contrary to the widespread opinion that there is no historical-critical tradition in Islamic theology, the majority of Muslim scholars beginning at the time of the Prophet himself always used to ask for the historical context of the Qur'anic revelations. This was the reason for the emergence of a secondary genre of Qur'anic exegesis called "occasions of revelation" (asbab al-nuzul). For this genre see Serinsu, Ahmet Nedim: Tarihsellik ve Esbab-ı Nuzul (Historicity and the Occasions of Revelation), Istanbul 1996. But it is true that there are also literalist trends claiming that each verse of the Qur'an is universal and therefore independent of the historical context.

3 Tuğ, Salih: İslam Ülkelerinde Anayasa Hareketleri (Constitutional Movements in Islam), Istanbul 1969. Tuğ assumes that there were also Christians living in Medina who must have been part of this community.

4 Schimmel, Annemarie: Der Islam im Indischen Subkontinent (Islam in the Indian Subcontinent), Darmstadt 1983, pp. 5-7. Schimmel writes that the Muslim commander Muhammad b. al-Qasim on conquering a great part of the Indus valley after the year 711 recognized the Hindus and Buddhists as dhimmis, although they were no monotheists.

5 For the processuality of the theory and practice of Islamic law, see Toprakyaran, Erdal: Das osmanische Petitionswesen (mezalim) seit dem 18. Jahrhundert am Beispiel von Stadt und Provinz Trabzon (The Ottoman Mezalim System since the 18th Century using the Example of the City and Province Trabzon), Frankfurt 2007.


8 From among the many publications containing the lectures of Hazrat Inayat Khan, the book "The Unity of Religious Ideals" (Geneva 1949) seems to be the most relevant regarding the idea of pluralism. The view that it is also the followers of Hazrat Inayat Khan who are convinced representatives of a pluralistic world view is presented in: Toprakyaran, Erdal: Sufismus als Integrationsfaktor in Europa? (Sufism as a Factor of Integration in Europe?), in: Wiener Zeitschrift zur Geschichte der Neuzeit, 2/2005, pp. 112-117.


11 Kılcı, Rüya: Osmanlıdan Cumhuriyete Sufi Geleneğin Taşycıları (The Transmitters of the Sufi Tradition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic), Istanbul 2009.


1. Significance and parameters of interreligious dialogue

The German poet Christian Morgenstern once observed with considerable insight that language – including speech and hence dialogue – "is a tremendous, continuing invitation to aspire to higher development". When the mind is directed towards the possible limits as well as the great potential of interreligious dialogue, the individual accepts the invitation to aspire to higher development. This is then about a shared process of higher development, as well as higher development in a spirit of mutual benevolence and respect.

And it is in three crucial fields that this higher development is of enormous political relevance:

- it is of domestic political relevance, because intercultural and interreligious dialogue brings together the different cultures and religions;
- it is of European political relevance, because the only way European integration can work is through intercultural and interreligious dialogue;
- and it is of global political relevance, because a not insignificant proportion of the conflicts in the world are caused by an interreligious dialogue which is proving unsuccessful or has not even started – and this does not pertain only to the conflict between Israel and Palestine, the 11 September 2001 terror attack or the war in Afghanistan.

Interreligious dialogue is indispensable for sustainable and successful policy-making in Germany, Europe and the world and so it is nothing less than one of the foundations for social life. Interreligious dialogue presupposes awareness: self-awareness as well as awareness of one's counterparts.

One of the major difficulties in the dialogue between Christianity and Islam is obvious: it concerns the issue of diversity in the denominations of both these religions. Christianity is experienced in its various facets and denominations: there are Catholics and Protestants, orthodox worshippers and other groupings that have developed over the centuries. Similarly, in Islam, a careful distinction also needs to be made between Shiites and Sunnites – and the Alevi are also very important, especially in the case of Germany.

In interreligious dialogue, it is of the utmost importance to be aware of this denominational diversity. Some aspects of doctrine are not even accepted by Christianity as a whole. And an even greater degree of heterogeneity is perhaps present in Islam, which has not seen the emergence of institutions teaching doctrine, such as the Papacy or the Vatican Council in the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, one should be cautious when speaking of Christianity or Islam as such.

In particular, interreligious dialogue also reveals what defining influence can be exerted on people and civilizations by a religion that has prevailed for centuries in a given region.
An examination of the particular characteristics of a culture may well lead to questioning many aspects that have hitherto been taken for granted. Culture will be seen as the result of a defining religious influence. For that reason, it seems obvious that the first consequence of interreligious dialogue is, and must be, to attain greater knowledge and certainty about one's own faith. Subsequently, dialogue with followers of other religions will lead to recognition, as if through a magnifying glass, of what is specific to one's own religion.

Despite all the different directions and defining influences in Christianity and Islam which further complicate inter-religious dialogue, both religions are nevertheless religions based on inspired books and with a common written foundation. This can be used as a basis to establish and build up a dialogue. At this point, theologians will immediately raise the objection that the study of sources among both Christians and Muslims has indeed brought some very different roots to light. But this is not the object of the current analysis as it considers various aspects of the political motivation of interreligious dialogue.

2. Beyond discourse: the objectives of interreligious dialogue

Each of the two religions, Christianity and Islam, lays an exclusive claim to verity, a claim which at first sight does not appear to particularly encourage dialogue. But true dialogue takes the individual's own viewpoint just as seriously as that of the other party. So a superficial "multi-culti" approach can never genuinely satisfy the requirements of interreligious dialogue.

But interreligious dialogue is not about finding a common, uniform religion. Unlike ecumenical talks, interreligious dialogue is not driven by a possibility of unity – as was the case, for instance, with Christianity's hopes for shared Holy Communion or the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. Rather, the objective is to reach a position of genuine tolerance with a view to bearing with others – although they are different, and maybe even because they are different – and to tolerate convictions that are fundamentally divergent.

All the same, interreligious dialogue is more than just an informative discourse. It is about presenting specific guidelines that both religions subscribe to. It is important to seek clarification of the statements dating from the past, and perhaps even of the prejudices that have found their way into the Koran and the Holy Scriptures, on the grounds that their authors were also only human. For Christianity, the historical-critical approach to research has become an important tool for filtering out the original Christian messages from the Holy Scriptures. Much would be gained if the Koran were to be treated in the same way in Islam.

It is not conducive to good dialogue to have partners on both sides who are fanatics. On the other hand, people with a fixed and well-founded point of view are certainly good dialogue partners. Fanaticism and a fixed viewpoint constitute entirely different attitudes. It is especially those who are ready to engage in conversation from a firm religious footing who will lay the foundations for genuine dialogue.

The objectives of dialogue are to show respect for the other religion as well as regard for the faith and the believers of the other religion. In doing so, one should always be extremely cautious in establishing the areas where the notion of God is the same, where it is similar and where it is entirely different. It is important to eliminate any misunderstandings. These are often caused by both sides attributing completely different meanings to specific terms. Most people are able to translate the term "jihad" straightaway. The "Holy War" has provoked
many fears and phobias. Discussions on how best to lead a holy life will immediately produce corresponding analogies.

3. **Church and state**

The question of the relationship between religion and politics, church and state is an especially important one, and one that is marked by tension. In the history of Europe, it is well known that the confrontations between crown and altar have left their mark on the events of centuries. While realizing that religion is something personal, Christians today are well aware that it also extends far into the political realm. For decades, this system of interrelations has deliberately been overlooked, for fear of giving rise to suspicions of religious intolerance. But the fact is that there is no need for anybody else to know what religion people have or choose. On the other hand, the peaceful handling of these religious decisions within our society is something that concerns every individual.

It should be borne in mind that interreligious dialogue has very much in common with trustfulness and respect. The term ‘dialogue’ refers to partners talking to one another as equals, and recognizing their respective characters and opinions as being equal in value. It implies that partners will be ready to carefully compare and reconsider positions.

What is more, this need for trust and respect also extends to such practical issues as providing Muslims in Germany with appropriate prayer rooms, which are, first of all, no longer relegated to the back yard and secondly, are set up in harmony with the local population. But in return, there is of course an obligation, a strong wish and a duty to call for religious freedom for Christians. It is a depressing fact that Christians can even risk life and limb, especially in Islamic countries. Converts are even more at risk. Finally, it is essential to be aware of what both sides have in common in interreligious dialogue, and what separates them. It needs to be borne in mind that even in our secular world, belief in one God is one of the elements creating a sense of community. This community is often more influential than many other communities – professional communities for instance, or nationality-based communities. Only through this joint awareness, only when all believers share a sense of belonging can a differentiated view of the other religion be successful. It is solely on this basis that it is possible to recognize that the Christian West is not a cesspit of sin and decadence, or that Islam does not primarily mean extremism, Shari‘ah and the suppression of women.

Partners in dialogue who are able to make this distinction, and who are aware of what they have in common and what separates them, will be able to recognize and identify the limits of interreligious dialogue, clearly and without unnecessary emotionality. They will have the capacity to tolerate these limitations.

4. **Human rights**

Respect for universal human rights is not only an important goal for dialogue but also the primary condition for dialogue to take place at all.

In a world where it is becoming increasingly easier to cover long distances, where wars, economic hardship or other events have caused migrations of entire populations, religions have drawn geographically closer to each other. The importance of the individual means that many norms are questioned in the process of individual decision-making. Pluralism is called for on a scale that would have been inconceivable a few decades ago. For a state to function properly, it is therefore absolutely essential to respect and protect the rights of the individual.
The crucial and basic foundation for any and all interreligious dialogue in Germany must therefore be that everyone who lives in Germany, whether Christian, Muslim or atheist, identify with the existing democratic system of rights and values. A democratic pluralistic state cannot afford a pluralistic approach to basic principles, if it intends to uphold its democratic pluralism. Germans are very sensitive in this respect. In the twentieth century, the people of Germany twice experienced what it means for a person to be denied respect for individual dignity, and for totalitarianism to obliterate all the achievements of humanism that a society was able to create.

Consequently, one conclusion is therefore quite clear: that interreligious dialogue must be based on consensus. But democracy and human rights, open-mindedness and an open attitude to the world, tolerance and freedom of religion – none of these are negotiable. In this respect, the equality of men and women is of great importance. Banning Muslim girls from taking part in sport and swimming classes, forced marriages, honour killings: all these are not acceptable. Those who relativize on these issues by claiming a higher system of rights or values are jeopardizing the peaceful coexistence of human beings.

Furthermore, interreligious dialogue can play a trailblazing role here and show the extent to which respect for democracy and human rights can be derived from Islam as well. This is also a condition for the introduction of Islamic religious instruction in state schools in Germany: it must be clear that there is also respect and support for the constitutional basic order.

One claim can be made with confidence: Muslims living in Germany will become firmly convinced of their integration in this country only when Islam and the requirements of the German Basic Law and the Bavarian Constitution are brought into line with one another. Because when that takes place, they will no longer have to live with the conflicting demands imposed on them by different value systems.

5. **The issue of fanaticism**

As already mentioned, fanatics are incapable of dialogue. Religious fanaticism is the number one killer of any and all interreligious dialogue. It renders differing views irreconcilable. Rather than bringing people closer together, it leads to violence and counter-violence. The fanaticism shown by some people in connection with their religion is a really puzzling phenomenon, and completely alien to a Christian's sense of charity.

And quite frankly, it is dismaying to read the study "Muslims in Germany" published in 2007 on behalf of the German Federal Ministry of the Interior. In the survey, 40% of adult Muslims and 44% of the schoolchildren who were interviewed claimed to believe in a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam and to reject Western values. More than half of the people interviewed fully agreed with the statement that Islam was the only true religion. The ties linking them to their country of origin and culture of origin were very strong; among the group of schoolchildren questioned, only 28% showed any willingness to adapt while 20% were in favour of social segregation.

6. **Opportunities and prospects for interreligious dialogue**

The limitations facing interreligious dialogue as a result of fanaticism, the absence of any willingness to embrace democracy and the rejection of human rights can be clearly seen. But the opportunities are just as obvious.

Firstly, these opportunities lie in following the principles outlined above for a successful interreligious dialogue. And secondly,
they lie with the people themselves, in the willingness of the majority to live together in peace and to engage in a peaceful dialogue.

In denominational and cultural terms, Europe is now more heterogeneous than it has ever been. There are thousands of areas which bring people of different religions together in everyday life – in sporting activities, at clubs, in the workplace, at local festivals. The number of marriages and partnerships between people of different religions is still on the increase. Today, every one in five marriages entered into in Germany already involves two nationalities. The partners are most often of Turkish extraction, and so Muslims. Roughly one and a half million children grow up in these relationships. Interreligious partnerships have long since become the norm in Germany and their number will continue to increase. The same is also true of the rest of Europe.

Marriage and partnership are very fertile ground for the success of interreligious dialogue. Both partners are confronted with the need for interreligious dialogue on a lifelong basis, hour after hour, day after day. There is no escaping this, as there is no escaping many other issues in a marriage. So this offers a superb opportunity for interreligious dialogue, and is a fact of life and of the actual living conditions for many religious believers all over the world.

In conclusion, the notion of religious tolerance can best be illustrated by the well-known and familiar play "Nathan the Wise" by Lessing. When Nathan the Wise tells the sultan Saladin the famous Parable of the Three Rings, Saladin is both ashamed and moved. He recognizes how infinitely close to each other are the three great religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and that they are like brothers. And he feels how fruitful dialogue could be – despite all that separates them, or indeed because of all that separates them. In the end, he dismisses Nathan the Wise with words which concisely sum up everything that interreligious dialogue should really be. He says to him: "Go! – Go! – But be my friend".
1. Introduction

What does Pancasila in Indonesia stand for? Pancasila stands for the five basic philosophico-ideological principles, that is: belief in the one and only God, a just and civilized humanity, the unity of Indonesia, democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations among representatives, social justice for all of the people of Indonesia. It took lengthy and heated debates to gain acceptance by the majority of the Indonesian people as the sole philosophy of the state. There is currently only a very small minority of Muslims who still want an Islamic state for Indonesia instead of Pancasila.

Under the umbrella of Pancasila, all the religious minorities – Catholics, Protestants, Hindus, Buddhists and Confucianists (together around 12% out of a population of 235 million) – have felt secure in their religion as an inseparable part of the Indonesian people. For them, the threat of an Islamic state has been eliminated once and forever. As a common platform fully accepted by the people, Pancasila has effectively proven and demonstrated its binding power for maintaining the edifice of different religious coexistence in Indonesia, as will be discussed below.

2. The sociological phenomena of Indonesian Islam

Although Indonesia is well known as having the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesian Islam as a cultural, intellectual, and political expression has never been a monolithic faith system. In terms of ritual ceremony, the religious expressions of Indonesian Muslims have certainly varied, ranging from syncreticism to puritanism. The same phenomena can also be observed in other Muslim countries. Drawing on two major sources, the Qur'an and the examples of the Prophet, Muslim thinkers, theologians, philosophers, sufis, and political theorists have for centuries built up and developed diverse, complicated, and even contradictory interpretations of the two in dealing with many issues, including the issue of interfaith relations and dialogue.

In the case of Islam in Indonesia, reinforced as it is by the principles of Pancasila, the country has been fortunate because the great majority of Muslims are in favour of waging peace through interfaith dialogue and cooperation. There is no doubt that peaceful religious coexistence in Indonesia is now is a true historical reality. There is only a small minority of Muslims who still oppose it and say that the endeavour is futile. This sort of attitude probably derives from their limited, subjective and ad hoc understanding and interpretation of the same sources. The militant and radical splinter groups which may have bred terrorists are actually a new and disturbing brand in Indonesian Islam. Albeit in the minority, they are extremely vocal and harshly aggressive. They are trying to monopolize the truth of Islam on the basis of bizarre interpretations.

These types of phenomena can also be found in certain parts of the world where religious fundamentalists or the most extreme wings (terrorists) have fertile soil in which to survive, though in the past two years the territory over which they can move freely has increasingly narrowed. The Indonesian
counter-terrorism squad Special Detachment 88 of the Indonesian National Police is constantly on the alert to observe the changing tactics and strategy of terrorists. These special forces police have been incredibly successful in conducting their job of hunting down terrorists. Even so, some outsiders have come to the false conclusion that these terrorists are the true representative and real face of Indonesian Islam. Here lies the danger in observing complex socio-religious phenomena from afar.

Of course, there have been horizontal and vertical conflicts between people in certain parts of Indonesia, as in Ambon, central Kalimantan, central Sulawesi, and Aceh. But these conflicts were originally triggered by political and economic interests; then religions were forced to enter the arena, and made things complicated and even bloody.

As an archipelagic country consisting of more than 17,000 islands, Indonesia still has far to go in the process of national integration, an ongoing process which remains far from complete. If Indonesia as a multi-ethnic nation is able to survive for centuries to come, one may interpret this as a miracle of history, and only hope that it will indeed happen.

The national experiences of more than six decades have shown beyond doubt that the efforts to make this nation-state intact were painful and involved risks. Unfortunately, not many political elites are really aware of this problem. They consider this new-born nation to be a given entity that has been historically solid and stable. The factual reality does not support this perception. This sort of ahistorical attitude is dangerous and may undermine the nation-building process which is still critical and badly needs serious care and full attention.

Again, many pragmatic political elites in Indonesia today have not taken heed of this problem and have failed to confront this question. What Indonesia currently needs, and what it sadly lacks, is the presence of visionary statesmen at various levels who are ready to defend the unity and integrity of this nation at all costs.

3. The protective umbrella role of Islamic mainstreams

One definite conclusion can be drawn from the author's own experience and many years' involvement in promoting and fostering peace through interfaith dialogue and cooperation in Indonesia. And that is, that creating a sincere brotherhood between different faiths is not only possible but necessary and surprisingly beautiful. The intimate and warm friendship with non-Muslim minorities, be they Catholic cardinals, bishops, and laymen, Protestant fathers and priests, Buddhist and Hindu monks, and Confucian top figures, has led to a deep conviction that humanity is really one.

Moreover, another important and more striking point to note is that believers should not only cooperate among themselves, but should also be ready to coexist with and accommodate non-believers and even atheists, and vice versa. The only condition required for this peaceful coexistence is that each party must have mutual respect and no hidden agenda to eliminate each other.

Concerning the issue that atheism should be accommodated, certain Indonesian 'ulamā' (Islamic traditional scholars) and intellectuals were initially angry and then questioned the author's theological position as a Muslim. One of them was deeply disappointed and restless, and was even ready to request through his friend a religious advice (fatwa) from the Central Board of Muhammadiyah regarding the author's statement on atheism. But after hearing an explanation of the Qur'anic background to this view, both he
and his friend became silent, and have remained so.

The implication of this is that he and many others like him have minimal and limited knowledge of the Qur'anic texts in relation to the theological recognition of human free will and free choice. According to this author's reading of the Qur'an, God in fact offers freedom to all human beings to believe or not to believe, and the risk becomes their business with God here and in the hereafter. In other words, one who claims to be an atheist or an apostate cannot be brought before the court to face a religious punishment, as many classical Muslim fuqahā' (legal theorists) claim.

In Indonesia, this issue is still far from reaching any definite religious solution. It seems that there are not many 'ulamā' who have the religious courage to re-think and re-examine the Qur'an more contextually and freshly. The progress or otherwise of Islamic civilization will largely depend on the ability of Muslims themselves to creatively respond to the challenge of the day. Any interpretation of religious texts is always time-bound. Because of this, even a scholar of high calibre has no right to monopolize the truth. The Qur'an strongly prohibits mankind from being a blind follower of anyone, including the 'ulamā'.

The militant and radical groups are, however, ready to die in bloodshed to defend the fatwa of classical Muslim jurists at all costs. Not to mention whether the 2002 Bali and the 2009 Jakarta Marriott hotel bombers, blood-thirsty personalities who deliberately killed innocent people, would feel upset once the right of punishment on atheists and non-believers is totally abrogated from Muslim classical legal documents. For these terrorist groups, killing other people who differ ideologically from their religious view is in some cases their way of earning money. Therefore, what really happens here is nothing other than a misuse of religion for the lowest worldly interests and purposes.

The Qur'an states firmly that killing one single human being means killing all humanity. To quote: ‘… if anyone slays a human being – unless it be as [in punishment] for murder or for spreading corruption on earth – it shall be as though he had slain all mankind; whereas, if anyone saves a life, it shall be as though he had saved the lives of mankind.’ To be fair, not only certain helpless Muslims monopolize the practices of suicide bombings; other religious disciples have also done almost the same. The feeling of humiliation and acute despair experienced by certain people may be responsible for these kinds of wrongful acts.

As they move strategically towards a humanistic understanding and interpretation of Islam, the Muslim mainstreams in Indonesia, represented by Muhammadiyah and NU (Nahdhatul Ulama), will face a great historical challenge in the near future. The non-Muslim minorities, in particular, have the sincere and serious hope that Muhammadiyah and NU will continue their important role to become an umbrella for all people in the country, regardless of their faith, creed, and other spiritual denominations. Indonesia as a nation and even the world at large should show their gratitude to these major streams that are moderate, open-minded, and modern in their worldview, sharply distinctive from their counterparts in many other Muslim countries.

In hunting terrorism, for example, they give full backing to the Indonesian police so that they can effectively accomplish their work. Though the Indonesian archipelago remains fertile ground for terrorist activities and attacks, the space in which they are able to move freely has become increasingly limited and narrow, due to the tight and shrewd strategy of the police to immediately end domestic terrorism. The police strategy in dealing with terrorism will be more effective if the whole population, including government officials, are obliged to give it support.
Some anti-terror police have voiced complaints that the support they expect from the government is not adequate. Nevertheless, what they have done so far to barricade terrorist territory has been successful. International observers have acknowledged the great achievement of Indonesian police in coping with these dangerous and uncivilized actions.

In the meantime, one cannot ignore the fact that rampant corruption and other social ills undermining the basic principles of Pancasila and poisoning Indonesian contemporary culture contribute to the terror activities among the poor and less-educated Muslims who are the real victims of a corrupt political system. In Indonesia, it is a valid observation that corruption also breeds terrorism. Once corruption is successfully and effectively eradicated and the principle of social justice as strongly commanded by Pancasila becomes a reality, the territory available for terrorism will surely disappear within a relatively short time.

Of course, external factors such as the plight and suffering of the Palestinians, Afghans and Iraqis are also responsible for triggering terror activities in Indonesia in order to show solidarity, but in the wrong way. However, domestic factors seem to be more dominant. Non-Muslim colleagues and friends always regard Muhammadiyah and NU as their protectors from any religious extremism, though many of the Muslims themselves have become the victims of terrorism. The statement has often been made that terrorism in all forms is the true enemy of human civilization.

4. From dialogue to concrete action

The Indonesian interfaith leaders are not only actively involved in religio-moral intellectual dialogues, but they are also working on the ground to help enlighten people at the grass-roots level. When Aceh province was destroyed by the dreadful wave of the tsunami in December 2004, interfaith top figures led by Cardinal Julius Darmaatmadja, S. J. visited the area soon after. They provided some financial aid to the families affected by the tragedy, including a traditional Muslim boarding school (pesantren) that had been destroyed by the tsunami. One can imagine how happy a small and poor pesantren must have felt when they were visited by a cardinal accompanied by other interfaith leaders to console the santris (pesantren pupils) and their kiyais (teachers) who survived the calamity. The visit to this predominantly Muslim province indeed symbolized the interfaith leader's real cooperation and commitment to show deep sympathy and empathy to those who were suffering extremely from a serious natural disaster.

The Good Governance Project is another on-the-ground effort that lasted three years until 2008. It was organized by the Maarif Institute and funded by the Ford Foundation. This project was launched in three local districts located in three different provinces: Lampung, Jogyakarta, and Central Java. The interfaith leaders also acted as keen observers monitoring the progress and development of the project. Its purpose was to establish hard facts as to how local governments performed efficiently and effectively in serving people in their own territories. Three categories were used by the Project to measure and evaluate the success or failure of the work of local governments in executing their function as public servants: transparency, accountability, and efficiency as a prerequisite for creating good governance. That project ended with great success, a success that could not be separated from the significant and crucial role played by the interfaith leaders in the vital stages of monitoring the project.

In the future there will be various dynamic activities in many provinces in Indonesia, organized by local interfaith leaders to serve
and help the needy, regardless of their socio-religious background. If this positive and constructive trend continues, Indonesia might well become a good example for other nations to follow. The true function of faith is to bind, not to divide people because of their different religious backgrounds. Once this can take place freely in many parts of the world, peace will no doubt be part of our future. When philosophy fails to provide the answer to the true meaning of human life, religion can come to the fore to give us the final word. Spiritual understanding of the meaning of life and death is not solely the domain of philosophy. The more meaningful and true essence of life and death is enshrined in the realm and province of religions.

5. A concluding reflection

Although the echo of the suicide bombings still reverberates in this country's domestic situation, one thing is quite clear: Indonesian soil is not fertile enough to let terrorists operate here for too long. The authentic Pancasila culture never provided space for any extremism, radicalism, and terrorism. Interfaith dialogue and cooperation has now been deep-rooted and well developed in Indonesia for more than a decade. It has stood up firmly and effectively to combat any deviation from the original state philosophy of this great nation. Here lies a great hope for all religions to coexist and flourish peacefully forever in this beautiful archipelago called Indonesia.

Notes

1 The original formula of Pancasila was first proposed by Sukarno, the first president of Indonesia, on June 1, 1945, in his oral speech to establish a state philosophy for an independent Indonesia, with its consecutive sila (principles) as follows: Indonesian Nationalism, Internationalism, Consultation or Democracy, Social Welfare, and Belief in God. The present form of Pancasila was the result of modification on August 18, 1945 initiated by Vice President Mohammad Hatta as the constitutional response to the demand of Christian leaders from the eastern part of the country.

2 See Leo Suryadinata, Evi Nurvidya Arifin, and Aris Ananta: Indonesia's Population: Ethnicity and Religion in a Changing Political Landscape, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore 2003, p. 103. This figure was based on the national census of the year 2000.

3 See, for instance, the Qur'an (Q) 10: 99, 2:256, and many others.

4 Q 17: 36.

5 See the Qur'an chapter 5 verse 32. The translation by Muhammad Asad, The Message of the Qur'an, Dār al-Andalus, 1980, p. 147.
Nahdlatul Ulama – traditional Islam and religious tolerance

Ulrich Klingshirn

1. Introduction

This article deals with the history of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) as the largest Islamic mass organization and as a political force in Indonesia. In particular, NU integrates specific aspects of the Javanese cultural region into its basic theological beliefs and it was therefore able to develop its very own characteristics. Despite its traditional approach, NU today has an open mind about contemporary issues such as the interfaith dialogue or the protection of natural resources, which the organization also promotes at the international level.

2. The spread of Islam in Indonesia

The first time Indonesia made contact with Islam was in the 15th century when Muslim seamen passed Java and Sumatra on their way to trade with India and Southern China. By that time, Indonesia was mostly populated by Hindus and animistic believers. The spread of Islam in Indonesia was slow-paced and came to an end in the 18th century. A crucial factor for the spread of Islam in Indonesia was the downfall of the mighty Hindu kingdom Majapahit in Central Java, which was defeated by the rising sultanates in West Java. As a result, many Hindu kings converted to Islam and founded sultanates, among which for instance are Yogyakarta and Solo.

However, despite the violent conflicts, the new faith was accepted in most parts of the country by voluntary choice. The majority of the missionaries were Sufi preachers who practiced a Sunni Islam. At the same time, these preachers were also tolerant towards the local traditions and values of the faith which had been previously practiced. A further reason for the peaceful acceptance of Islam was the equality of the individual before Allah and the ensuing abolishment of the Hindu caste system. Last but not least, the economic and cultural dominance of Islam during that era was also a crucial factor, as conversion to Islam was equal to advancement to a higher civilization.

The peaceful spread of Islam in Indonesia was decisive for the further development of Indonesia, which was marked by a tolerant coexistence of Muslims and people of different faith. This also applied to believers whose faith was based on a syncretism of different religions. Up until the end of the Dutch colonial era, Indonesia was a strongly heterogeneous nation in terms of religion, which was mainly expressed by the several different manifestations within Islam. Clifford Geertz has identified the following religious groups in Javanese society ("aliran"):2

− the "santri", which represents a rather orthodox interpretation of Islam, similar to the Islam in Arabic countries. Devotees of this group mostly live in urban areas;

− the "abangan", which comprises elements from Islam, Hinduism and even Buddhism. This form of belief is closely connected with the Javanese values and traditions ("kejawen"), which accept supernatural powers, and is based on the Javanese theory of harmony;

− the "priyayi", which consists of members of the former elite Hindu caste and is inspired by Hindu-Javanese traditions.
These three mainstreams mingled at the beginning of the 19th century. In particular, rising resistance against the Dutch colonial power facilitated an upswing of Islam in Indonesia. During that time, various organizations were founded with the objective of strengthening the Islamic faith within the population and rising up against the colonial power.

After Indonesia became independent, its first president, Sukarno, developed a state ideology which defines the following five religions as equal: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism; and recently also Confucianism. Due to the compulsion to choose one of the above-mentioned faiths, the majority of "abangan" people chose to commit themselves to Islam, whereas others chose Christianity or Hinduism as their religion.

In spite of this technical determination to one specific faith, the various Islamic mainstreams are still existent in Javanese society today. The traditional forms, which are based on "kejawen", are particularly dominant in Indonesian rural society. Among these are the belief in supernatural powers, the cult of saints as well as the belief in ghosts. These traditional forms are accepted as a cultural characteristic of society's values and norms by the Indonesian state philosophy under the term "adapt".3

Today, this group of culturally influenced Muslims is more and more opposed by an increasing number of followers of the "pure" Islam, the roots of which are in the Wahhabi doctrine. The followers of this stream object to the integration of Javanese-Indonesian elements into Islam and demand the establishment of a Sharia state with Saudi Arabia as its paradigm.4

3. NU's Islamic basic orientation

In contrast to the above-mentioned characteristics of the culture-oriented and puristic Islam, the two biggest Islamic mass organizations in Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, which belong to the Sunni denomination, appear as rather moderate. Yet there are significant differences between the two organizations, as detailed below.

Founded in 1912, the Muhammadiyah today comprises more than 30 million followers and can be described as an Islamic organization with modernistic concepts. The religious perception of this organization defines itself through the propagation of a pure Islam which is based on the Koran (Al-Quran) and the written tradition of the life of the Prophet Muhammad (Al Hadith). The Muhammadiyah claims a practice of religion which is free from the impact of local beliefs and traditions. Although the Pancasila as the basis of the Indonesian faith community has long been rejected by the Muhammadiyah, nowadays the organization accepts the state as an important frame of reference which should also regulate questions concerning Islamic law. That specifically applies to the superior union of the Indonesian Islamic scholars (Majelis Ulama Indonesia), who claim that Islamic decrees (fatwas) should regulate almost every aspect of the communal life of a Muslim.

These decrees have recently gained growing influence within the national legislation. Since its founding as a reform movement, Muhammadiyah has promoted the social and economic development of the country mainly through the development of an education and healthcare system in Indonesia. Today, almost 6,000 schools, various universities and several hundred hospitals and healthcare centres in Indonesia are run by the Muhammadiyah.

In response to the formation of the Muhammadiyah as a modernistic Islamic mass organization, the idea came up to form an Islamic movement which acknowledges particularly the characteristics of Islam in Java and Indonesia. Within this context, the
Islamic movement Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) emerged on 31 January 1926 under the guidance of the founding fathers Wahab Chasbullah and Hasym Asy'ari, who was a highly esteemed Islamic scholar (Kyai) in East Java at that time. Translated as "Resurgence of Islam", this organization can be described as a traditional Islamic alignment affiliated with the religious orientation of the "Ahlus Sunnah wa Al-Jama'ah" (Sunnis). Its approximately 40 million adherents live predominantly in the rural areas.

In its traditions, NU refers to the "Nine Saints" (Wali Songo) who brought Islam to Java in the 15th century. These bearers of Islam were Sufis from India and the Arabian Peninsula who searched through forms of meditation and transcendence for the true path to reach God. The graves of these nine founding fathers who initiated the spread of Islam in Indonesia are still frequently visited by pilgrims and are revered by believers.

Islamic boarding schools (Pesantren) in which scholars are taught the ways of Islam constitute another pillar of the NU faith. The orientation of these boarding schools originates from the perception of the respective founders of the schools, who in most cases belong to a Sufi brotherhood. Even today these schools are not subject to governmental control. In addition to the Islamic boarding schools, NU has established an immense network of social facilities in rural areas which contribute to the alleviation of poverty.

The integration of Islam in the history of Indonesia illustrates that the doctrines of Nahdlatul Ulama vary distinctly from the modernistic concepts of the Islamic organization Muhammadiyah. The majority of NU Islamic scholars agree that the traditional Javanese spirituality can coexist with the doctrines of Islam as long as these practices do not contradict the prescriptions of the Koran and the Sunnah. The following religious perceptions characterize the faith of the adherents of Nahdlatul Ulama:

- faith in the Koran and the tradition of the work and deeds of the Prophet (Al Hadith). Inclusion of the scriptures of the four Islamic schools of law (Madh'hab), whereby particularly the school of Shafi'i regularly serves as a source of law since it allows the incorporation of customary traditions into the jurisdiction;

- integration of Sufism, according to which every Muslim has to find his own path to God, in the religious practice of NU. The above-mentioned religious scriptures serve as an exclusive source. Due to this spiritual approach, the holy struggle (jihad) is considered an internal fight of each individual which aims to help the individual to be a good Muslim. This interpretation contrasts strongly with the concept of Wahhabism which defines the holy struggle as an external struggle against everything that poses a threat to Islam, particularly threats by the non-Muslim population;

- belief in the power of the Islamic scholars (Kyai) who attain their own interpretations of Islam through spiritualism and knowledge. Therefore alterations and innovations are not excluded if they can contribute usefully to the traditions;

- acknowledgement and inclusion of traditional Javanese practices and beliefs such as the pursuit of harmony, cosmology and the view of the world as a natural unity.

As a result of these perceptions and the practice of Sufism, which promotes an individual approach to come closer to God, a variety of religious practices occur within the constituency of Nahdlatul Ulama. These perceptions occasionally lead to a high degree of tolerance and recognition of NU towards other trends within the Islamic community.
4. NU as a political power and party

Although it claims to be an Islamic mass movement without any political ambitions, the history of the NU shows that it can also be defined as a political force which aims to enshrine traditional Islam in Indonesia and to represent its adherents in an efficient manner. Therefore the establishment of NU can be considered a reaction to the formation of Muhammadiyah and to the theological differences between the two organizations. During the subsequent period, substantial tensions marked relations between the two organizations. These tensions were only partly settled after the successful struggle for independence from the colonial power.

In order to strengthen Islam and to introduce Islamic law (Syari'a Islam) in Indonesia, NU and Muhammadiyah jointly founded the Masyumi Party (Partai Majelis Syuro Muslimin Indonesia). In consequence of dissent concerning the staffing of executive positions in 1952, a breach occurred repeatedly between the two organizations and animated the NU to found the political party NU. In 1955, after the first free and public general elections during the Sukarno era, this party was able to poll 18 % of the votes. Hence the outcome of the election revealed that the party ranked third after Sukarno's leading party (National Party-Partai Nasional Indonesia), which had gained votes mainly from Muhammadiyah adherents. The NU achieved a similar result during the election for a constituent assembly with the aim of legitimizing Sukarno's constitution from the year 1952.

A controversial constitutional subject was the ensuing implementation of the Pancasila state philosophy, which promotes the equality of the five (today six) religions in Indonesia. The Islamic parties elected to the constituent assembly together held 45 % of the seats and built the coalition which promoted the implementation of Islamic rule in Indonesia. This coalition faced the nationalist block with the National Party of Indonesia. Due to the narrow majority in the Assembly, an amendment of the constitution could not be induced, and mid-1959 former President Sukarno decided that the original constitution of 1945 should remain valid.

In 1973, the NU was forced to merge with the Islamic party PPP (United Development Party), since under the authoritarian regime of Suharto only one Islamic party could be listed. The merger took place in 1973, and already nine years later the NU resigned from this union. The reason for this resignation was a number of issues concerning the staffing of executive positions. At the same time, the Islamic mass organization NU decided to keep aloof from the specific party politics – a step back to the founding mission of the organization, also known as "Kembali ke Khittah 1926".

In the same year, the most famous representative of NU, "Kyai" Abdurrahman Wahid – better known as Gus Dur – was elected Head of the NU. This decision was supported by the then president Suharto and the representatives of his government. The backing of his election related particularly to the resolution of the NU acknowledging the Pancasila as the single valid state philosophy. Hence the attitude of the Islamic party PPP, which later on claimed the introduction of the Islamic law, drew criticism by the NU. In this context, Gus Dur played an important role as an a prominent mentor of a moderate Islam who shaped the profile of the NU to this day.

During the turmoil in 1998, Gus Dur supported the students' claims for reform and so he can be justly called the father of Indonesian democracy. In 1999 the Islamic party coalition in parliament constituted him president. His three-year presidency was marked by distinct efforts in the social and cultural sector. However, his weaknesses revealed themselves in a rather erratic style of leadership. He was dismissed from his
duties as president by parliament on the basis of as yet unproven accusations of bribery. His successor was the vice president and daughter of former president Sukarno, Megawati Sukarno Putri. The National Awakening Party (PKB), originally founded by Gus Dur, continued to take part in parliamentary elections in the following period but could only poll 5% of the votes in 2009. In view of this, the NU at its 32nd national conference in Makassar 2010 (Muktamar XXXII) decided once again to withdraw from politics and to focus its activities on social projects.6

5. Examples of Nahdlatul Ulama's positions and practices today

As already highlighted, the original intention of the NU founding fathers not to actively intervene in politics could not be maintained. In the course of time, it has established various parties, which in terms of their politics are closely linked to the organization. However, it is doubtful whether these parties have been successful.

For instance, institutional difficulties and internal conflicts concerning how leadership positions are to be filled have led to negative election results for the respective party. Of far more significance for the development of Islam in Indonesia has been the change in the NU's basic religious principles as a mass organization. Abdurrahman Wahid, accredited chairman of the NU and later president of Indonesia, initiated the transformation of the organization into a moderate Islamic movement which up to this day promotes tolerance and the equality of the religions. This is also evidenced by the fact that the National Awakening Party (PKB) frequently cooperates with the nationally oriented Party for Democratic Struggle (PDI-P) on a regional level.

The following examples reveal the current profile of the NU Islamic mass movement which is marked by the two contrasts: "conservatism vs. moderate Islam" and "traditionalism vs. modernity".

5.1 NU decree allows marriage of minors

Within the framework of the 32nd NU congress in Makassar, several Islamic decrees (fatwa) were released which aim to regulate life in the Islamic community in Indonesia. One particular decree dealing with marital law from an Islamic point of view attracted a great deal of attention: according to the committee on religious issues, there is no legal age restriction for marriage, as no such restriction can be found in the holy Koran. As a result, the marriage of minors is justified according to this decree.7

The release of this fatwa sparked harsh criticism from both secular and Islamic organizations alike. Indonesian politicians and human rights activists emphasized that the marriage of minors below a certain age breaches applicable law. A spokesperson of the Indonesian Commission on Violence Against Women (Komisi Nasional Perlindungan Anak dan Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan) highlighted that the established marital law from 19748 requires male and female spouses to be at least 18 and 16 years of age respectively. Unexpected criticism was voiced by two other leading Islamic organizations in Indonesia, the Indonesian Ulema Council (Majelis Ulema Indonesia / MUI) and Muhammadiyah. Both organizations pointed out that the theological justification of this fatwa is based exclusively on a very literal interpretation of the Koran and does not take today's circumstances into consideration. They also underlined the necessity of considering the overall development of a young woman when it comes to the marriage of minors. They too referred to the existing marital law which clearly defines the minimum age of the spouses. This law is currently being revised; however, the definition of the minimum age will remain unchanged.
However, from the NU point of view as a representative of traditional Islam, this decree seems to make sense: not only does it correspond to the Koran, but also to real-life practices in today's Javanese (and Indonesian) rural life. It is not uncommon for girls to be promised to a spouse at the age of ten to twelve. For the time being, they still live at their parents' house and will be married to their promised spouse by the time they reach puberty. This traditional form of marriage organized by parents derives from an economic background. Through the choice of a spouse with sufficient financial security, both families' belongings remain untouched and in case of a divorce, the wife can fall back on a dowry. Naturally, the marriages are executed only in accordance with Islamic laws, for which acknowledgement by the state is not required.9

5.2 The development of a "green NU"

Right from the start, NU acknowledged the relevance of the environment as an important part of Islamic spirituality. According to the understanding of most Sufi preachers, a holistic concept exists which emphasizes the circuit of relations between God, man and nature. In general, the aim is to find a balance between these components. This balance can only be found through meditation and spiritual activity. According to the Sufi perception in dealing with the environment, the following components should be considered:

- Islamic spirituality and cosmology;
- preservation and protection of natural resources;
- "preservation of traditions concerning nature", as well as
- transfer of knowledge through appropriate "spiritual teachers" (Kyai) to the population and the students.

Already in 2007, NU released a resolution on the protection of the environment and the development of ecological relationships between humans and nature.10 This resolution highlights environmental issues in Indonesia and particularly human intervention, such as illegal deforestation, intensive land use and habitat loss and damage caused by the overuse of available land. In a further development, measures have been put forward as to how natural resources can be used sustainably to protect the environment and human well-being. To achieve these objectives, NU calls for a kind of "holy war" (jihad) which should be performed by any individual and the community.11

Consequently, Nahdlatul Ulama has its own branch, the Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Management, Rural Development and Environment (LPPNU), which deals with issues of sustainable development and environmental protection. In collaboration with the Forestry and Agriculture Ministry, it realizes NU's various projects for sustainable development, particularly in rural areas in Indonesia. Additionally, a collection of sermons for the Islamic Friday prayer ("Qutbah") was created to encourage in particular the integrity of creation.12

5.3 The peaceful mission of the International Conference of Islamic Scholars (ICIS)

NU is also a leading organization in another field of activity. It organized the first International Conference of Islamic Scholars, or ICIS, in Jakarta in 2004.13 This conference was attended by representatives of various Islamic nations from the Middle East, Northern Africa and Southeast Asia. The permanent secretariat of this conference is located in the NU headquarters in Jakarta. A main concern for the organization's representatives is peace-keeping and conflict prevention in areas troubled with inter-
Within this framework, Western concepts such as respect for civil rights (civic education), gender equality and pluralism are also being discussed openly and supported by many representatives of this organization. The existence of such openness certainly derives from Sufism and the inclusion of traditional values and religious beliefs. As a result, a considerable pluralism of opinions and ideas are being discussed and accepted within NU. That is also one of the reasons why it is not surprising that minority groups with different beliefs and values are, to a certain extent, met with tolerance. In this respect, NU also plays an important role in international peacekeeping and conflict prevention, particularly when tensions between Muslim and non-Muslim populations threaten to arise.

However, the heterogeneity within NU also has its downsides, since the large number of various trends and directions leads to significant internal differences concerning the organization. A prominent example is the effort of NU to develop a political force. Despite an initially high approval rate among the population, the experiment to become politically active eventually failed. For this reason, it seems reasonable for the organization to withdraw from the political stage and to focus on returning to its core areas such as the spread of Islam and the representation of its followers.

Despite various attempts to modernize, NU can still be described as a traditionalist Islamic movement according to its belief that draws its strength from a conservatism of values. These values are based on Islamic, Javanese and Indonesian traditions. As a result, a distinctive characteristic of Islam has been developed in Indonesia which is based on harmony, tolerance and conflict prevention.
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